



Builder's Trials Complete

As dawn was breaking on Monday, 23 October 2006 at Northrop Grumman Ship Systems' Avondale shipyard, the sleek silhouette of a Navy warship eased away from the pier into the muddy Mississippi River. Nearly four years after her keel was laid and two years after she was launched, *New Orleans* (LPD 18) was on her way to sea at last. The long anticipation and repeated delays exacerbated by Hurricane Katrina's devastation faded into memory as the ship glided past the skyline of the city that was her namesake. The ship wasn't sailing away for good though; these were her Builder's Trials and she would return in a few days.

Builder's Trials are an opportunity for the shipbuilder to test major systems and operations at sea. The "big five" areas tested on LPD 18 were propulsion plant/full power, anchor handling, steering, ballast/



PCU *New Orleans* (LPD 18) sails past downtown New Orleans

de-ballast, and detect-to-engage. The ship passed every one of them with flying colors. Numerous other systems and operations were also successful. According to NGSS, over 86% of the trials scheduled achieved a passing score. Given the amount of new technology and extremely complex systems tested, those numbers were very encouraging. LPD 18's habitability services were also put to the test as she housed and fed over 800 personnel for four days. Eighty-five members of *New Orleans*' precommissioning

crew were among those onboard. Overall, testing went so smoothly that the ship returned after four days at sea rather than the scheduled five.

Despite the fact that BT was a resounding success, there is still much work to be done. *New Orleans* is back in the shipyard in Avondale and construction continues on numerous spaces and systems onboard. For the crew of this new ship, however, the light at the end of the tunnel is beginning to shine brightly. -LCdr. Romeus

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The Captain's Call

We can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel and we are working very hard to not have it be a speeding train running us over. Our tempo is increasing with each day and we will be incred-

PCO Cdr. John Skillman

ibly busy from right after Thanksgiving through Commissioning. We are pushing to take ownership of the ship as quickly as possible and complete our shipboard training and preparations rapidly to get the ship into service. Yes, it is safe to start planning for Commissioning on March 10, 2007. Please remind your Sailor to have you

included on the invitation list. We must have our invitations printed in December to allow enough time for mailing and replies. With the holidays coming up, it is right around the corner.

I am continually amazed by the crew. I have never had the good fortune to work with so many exceptionally talented and motivated Sailors. I say this because of the quality and speed of their work and the fine attitude that they display in all endeavors. Their reputation continues to grow through their performance in schools and team training, interaction with the shipbuilder and volunteer work. The beauty of Commissioning a new ship is to create the "soul" of the ship. This soul is lasting and is difficult to change. *New Orleans* is a blessed ship. BE BIG, BE EASY!

Non-Lethal

In addition to the multitude of other training courses they receive, crewmembers of LPD 18 also participate in Non-Lethal Weapons Training. This training is fast becoming legendary at the command, and crewmember's reactions to it make for interesting conversations. For the first few days of the class, each person is taught a variety of physical defense techniques for different circumstances. These range from a simple knockouts to fatal maneuvers. Then, on the last day of training each person is sprayed in the face with OC spray, commonly known as pepper spray. It is basically a potent chili pepper juice, and although it usually disables and hurts, the experience is different for everyone. Once sprayed, the trainee must complete an obstacle course.

Crew Heroes!

While training at the Admiral Prout Field House pool at Naval Base San Diego for the upcoming Search and Rescue School, Seaman Gene Cooner and Seaman Christopher Demonte put raw talent to good use. Cooner, while practicing the buddy tow, a rescue swimming technique, with Demonte, noticed a civilian jump off the high dive, but thought nothing of it at the time. After completing the lap and starting back toward the deep end, he noticed the same civilian lying motionless at the bottom of the pool. He released Demonte, took a deep breath and swam down to pull the unconscious victim to safety. Ready at the deck edge, Demonte grabbed the attention of the lifeguard on-duty, directed efforts in contacting emergency assistance, and readied himself to assist. Demonte and Cooner pulled the victim out of the water and placed him on his side to clear his lungs. Afterwards they stood-by to assist the lifeguard until emergency personnel arrived. -Lt. McNamera

Once completed, they splash water on their face to help alleviate the effects of the spray. Then they wait, because commonly, a reflash occurs. The course is an extremely valuable one. Crewmembers gain a sense of confidence in their individual capabilities, and as a sailor, you never know when these tools could be useful. -CS3 Cabrera



Lt. Benjamin Miller gets pepper sprayed.



Command Master Chief
Donald Graser

It's November and I'm sure many have thoughts of Thanksgiving and the beginning of Christmas Shopping. As well, November brings a time for remembrance of our Veterans—past and present. However, let us not forget an extremely important and powerful group who are also thought of during the month of November...the Military Family. Yes, November is Military Family Appreciation Month.

Instead of trying to write something that has already been written, allow me to pass some thoughts to you from our Chief of Naval Operations. He said it well, thus I will leave you with his words.

V/R,

CMDCM(SW/AW) D J Graser

"WE ALL KNOW AND APPRECIATE THE SACRIFICES OUR MILITARY FAMILIES MAKE. WE ALL UNDERSTAND HOW IMPORTANT FAMILIES ARE TO OUR PERSONAL READINESS. WE ALL KNOW THE DEGREE TO WHICH WE LEAN ON THEM, THE DEGREE TO WHICH WE VALUE THEIR SUPPORT, THEIR COUNSEL, AND THEIR LOVE. WE ALL RECOGNIZE THAT WE COULD NOT DO OUR PART IN THIS LONG WAR WITHOUT THEM. BUT WE MUST ALSO TAKE TIME TO RECOGNIZE THEIR COLLECTIVE IMPACT ON THE NAVY AT LARGE."

"THE TRUTH IS, OUR FAMILIES DO NOT JUST MAKE IT EASIER FOR US AS INDIVIDUALS TO SERVE OUR COUNTRY. THEY FIND WAYS -- THROUGH THE OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM, FAMILYLINE, THE FLEET AND FAMILY SUPPORT CENTERS, AND A HOST OF OTHER EFFORTS -- TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR OTHER MEMBERS OF THE NAVY FAMILY AS WELL. BY HELPING EACH OTHER, AND BY BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITIES, OUR FAMILIES MAKE IT EASIER FOR THE NAVY ITSELF TO ANSWER THE NATION'S CALL. IN THIS CRITICAL TIME, OUR NAVY FAMILIES ARE PLAYING A VITAL ROLE IN THE DEFENSE OF OUR NATION."

"TO ALL OF THEM, WHATEVER THEIR RELATION, I SAY THANK YOU. THANK YOU FOR STANDING BY YOUR SAILOR. THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT. AND THANK YOU FOR SHARING THE SACRIFICE OF MILITARY SERVICE WITH SUCH GRACE AND DIGNITY. I AM GRATEFUL, AND YOUR NAVY IS GRATEFUL."

"TO THOSE OF US IN RANKS, PLEASE JOIN ME THIS MONTH IN EXPRESSING GRATITUDE TO NAVY FAMILIES EVERYWHERE. TAKE TIME OUT OF YOUR BUSY DAYS TO RECOGNIZE EVERYTHING OUR FAMILIES DO TO MAKE WHAT WE DO POSSIBLE. THEY CERTAINLY DESERVE IT."

ADM MIKE MULLEN, CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS

Focus on: Training

Training is one of the most important activities that the crew undertakes during the pre-commissioning phase. It takes many forms, but the ultimate goal of all training is the same; preparing the crew to protect, maintain, operate, and employ this tremendously complex and capable warship.

One area that has seen a significant leap in training requirements has been anti-terrorism/force protection. Since many import watches are armed, nearly every member of the crew has to be weapons qualified. In recent months the Combat Systems department has overseen live fire

weapons training with 9 mm handguns as well as M-16 assault rifles. Training is yet to be conducted on 50 caliber machine guns, 12 gauge shotguns, and

M-60 machine guns. Other force protection related training includes non-lethal weapons training and Ship's Reaction Force (SRF) training. In the non-lethal

weapons course trainees learned to use OC spray, batons, and simple hand-to-hand combat and crowd control techniques. SRF training went further to include team tactical movements, communications, vehicle inspections, entry control points, and other concepts/skills.

Another major area of training is damage control and firefighting. The best training is always the most realistic training possible, so the crew of *New Orleans* has all experienced the challenge of patching a busted pipe while shivering in waist deep water in the darkness of the damage control trainer.

We have also been on the nozzle of a fire

hose battling a raging inferno in one of several fire trainers. Everyone has also gone through at least basic first aid and CPR qualification.



While we certainly hope to never have to use CPR, firefighting, or weapons onboard the *New Orleans*, if the need arises we will be ready.

What's Next?

The last few months before the commissioning of a Navy ship is an intense period of training and preparation for the crew. As construction wraps up, custody of the ship is transferred from the shipbuilder to the Navy and the crew begins to take over the care and operation of ship systems. In a matter of weeks the crew will turn this floating hunk of steel into their home, office, gym, cafeteria, workshop, hospital, and airport. Most of all, they will turn it into a lethal, flexible, and highly capable weapon system. The major steps in that process are highlighted below.

Crew Phasing – Split into multiple locations for over two years, the crew will finally assemble in Avondale, La., the week after Thanksgiving.

Acceptance Trials (AT) – Similar in scope to Builder's Trials. The ship puts to sea again for several days as the Navy assesses every detail for functionality, habitability, and survivability. This is essentially the Navy's test drive before signing for the keys. Acceptance Trials are scheduled for the week of 4 Dec.

Delivery – This is the date of the ship's official custody

transfer from the shipbuilder to the Navy. Technically, just about everything changes at this point. The ship's crew is officially assigned to the ship and becomes responsible for damage control, force protection, and security. Delivery is scheduled for 22 Dec.

Crew Move Aboard – Soon after delivery, the ship is ready for the crew to permanently move aboard. From then on the ship will be their only home until they arrive in homeport. Move aboard is scheduled for 11 Jan 07.

Certifications – Nearly all systems, warfare areas, and specialties need to be inspected and certified before the ship and her crew can be placed into full service. Some examples include Search and Rescue, Aviation, Force Protection, Well Deck, Crew Cert Phase I and II, and so forth.

Commissioning – The ceremony officially placing the ship and her crew into service. Scheduled for 10 Mar 07.

Sailaway – The ship leaves the commissioning site en route to her homeport. *New Orleans* will sail away from her namesake city within a few days of commissioning, stop in Pascagoula, MS for a couple of weeks, then head on to San Diego. -LCdr. Romeus

Gun Quals

PCU *New Orleans*' weapon qualification course was a smashing success and one-hundred percent of participants qualified on the Beretta M-9 9-millimeter pistol, the Navy's standard-issue sidearm. Due to a lack of operational shooting ranges in the New Orleans area, the qualification was held at the 20th Seabee Readiness Group's range in Woolmarket, MS. The qualification consists of each shooter firing 48 rounds; 12 from the 3 yard line, 12 from the 7 yard line, and 24 from the 15 yard line. The shooters are required to switch between "strong hand supported" and "weak hand supported" grips, and must draw the weapon from a holster prior to firing. These requirements simulate real-world scenarios, where an armed watchstander would be required to draw, aim, and fire their weapon if a threat was to present itself. The shooters attended a day-long classroom session the day before the qualification, which covered safety, rules of engagement, and the rules for the use of deadly force. Safety was addressed again at the range before commencing the qualification, and qualified Range Safety Officers and Line Coaches were on hand to ensure that the evolution proceeded with safety foremost in everyone's mind. *New Orleans* qualifications also include the M-16 rifle, 12 gauge shotgun, .50 caliber machine gun and M-60 machine gun. As GM1(SW/AW) Palma was quick to remind everyone at Saturday's event, "Trigger time is happy time!" -Lt. Miller



Brag Sheet

Advancements

Officer

Lt. Charles Dawson
Lt. Ryan Hinz
Lt. Robert McNamara
Lt.(jg) Ryan Tobin

CPO

CTTC Richard Dinio
NCC John Dooney
HTC Steve Girten

E6

SH1 Adolfo Almazan
EN1 Jerry Arias
ET1 Tomas Davila
YN1 Lisa Debose
EN1 Robert Flores
EN1 Cordon Phillips
CS1 Richard Ramones
BM1 Matthew Willing

E5

GM2 Kristina Ames
BM2 Jairo Andrade
HM2 Katrina Cable
HM2 Joseph Falcone
GM2 Mason Gerlach
ET2 Jared Graves
ET2 Robert Henry
ET2 Jessica Hobbs
EN2 Shannon Smith

E4

EM3 Michael Belden
PS3 Adam Bennett
EM3 Louis Delacruz
HT3 Scott Dempsey
EN3 Blake Denley
EN3 Christina Halbert
OS3 Ariel Knox
EN3 Eric Perez
OS3 Terrell Rodney
ABF3 Rafael Zelaya

Congratulations to new parents and their families!

CTT2 Biggs, NCC Dooney, YNSN Marquez, CSSN
Mayorga, ABF3 Medel, EN3 Mejia, GM2 Pearson,
ABF1 Sandi, ABF3 Zelaya.

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